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THE NEW CURRICULUM

by Walter D. Leavitt

The Trustees of Trinity College at their meeting of January 16, 1960, considered proposals for changes in the curriculum which would bring about a broad revision of the academic program of the College. The present curriculum has been in effect in substantially the same form for more than two decades.

President Albert C. Jacobs has constantly stressed in his annual reports the necessity of a complete survey of the academic program. Such a survey, however, could not be undertaken successfully by anyone without the complete understanding and support of the Faculty.

This support was forthcoming in May of 1958 when, by vote of the Faculty, the Curriculum Committee under the chairmanship of Dr. George B. Cooper was directed during the following year "to study the problem of improving the academic standards of the College including the relevancy of comprehensive examinations in the senior year." Subsequent action by the Faculty led to further implementation and deeper consideration of reforms which might be necessary for the improvement of the curriculum.

The work of the Curriculum Committee, its subcommittee and the cooperative Faculty is now history. A generous gift of $10,000 from the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation made it possible for the committee to function during the summer of 1959.

Dr. Walter D. Leavitt, executive secretary of the subcommittee of the Curriculum Committee, summarizes briefly for us here the important facets of the proposed changes in the curriculum.

"Since a broad revision of the Trinity College Curriculum has been recommended by the Faculty and submitted to the Trustees for their approval, it is appropriate to consider a few of the reasons for the changes and to sketch out the major points.

Constant Scrutiny of Goals

"A constant scrutiny of curricular goals is a major responsibility of any faculty and of any administration. When both realize that the quality of an academic program can be improved and that academic resources can be used more effectively, a fresh inquiry into the curriculum becomes necessary. Such was the case at Trinity. In May 1958 the Faculty voted to examine certain parts of the curriculum which needed changing. As a result of this review the Faculty recommended in November 1958 a thorough study and critical appraisal of the whole curriculum. In February 1959 President Albert C. Jacobs requested specific recommendations from all departments which would form the basis for such a study. Faculty agreement on this basis signaled the end of the first phase of the review.

"The second phase began with the appointment of a subcommittee of the Curriculum Committee whose task was to work out a new curriculum in detail. Members of the subcommittee were Dr. George B. Cooper, chairman, Dr. J. Wendell Burger, Dr. Robert H. Smellie, Dr. Frederick L. Gwynn, and Dr. Walter D. Leavitt, Executive Secretary. The subcommittee met in May and June and again in September 1959. By November both the Curriculum Committee and the Department Chairmen had approved the suggestions of the subcommittee; the completed report was presented to the whole Faculty in December 1959.

"While the proposed curricular revision presents broad changes which modify to a greater or lesser extent all segments of the former program, the alterations do not totally obscure a familiar landscape. The effect is more one of tightening, reducing and clarifying in a sincere attempt to re-emphasize Trinity's educational goals: to develop the student's ability to reason, to use his imagination, to communicate his ideas, and to further his capacity for continuing self-education.

Three Major Changes Proposed

"Among the myriad details of the proposed curriculum, there are three major changes around which all other facets of the program revolve:

"The first major change is a reduction in the number of degree requirements. Instead of seven or eight courses, as in the former program, all students, whether B.A. or B.S., would now take six Basic Requirements in fields designed to give them a general view of the fundamental areas of human knowledge. These Basic Requirements are English, a Foreign Language, European History, Mathematics, a Natural Science with laboratory, and Literature or Fine Arts or Music. These courses are normally taken during the freshman and sophomore years and provide the methods, basic facts and ideas which will furnish a common body of knowledge of sufficient breadth on which to base the last two years of concentrated study in a specific field.

"The second major change is the increased strengthening of the major field. The deeper exploration of a field of special interest would form the principal work of the junior and senior years. Since the Major provides for more intensive course work and for more independent study, which may take the form of projects, research, theses, seminars, or tutorials, it is suggested that the course load be reduced to four in each of the last two years. In addition to his Basic Requirements and major courses each student would complete his program by electing courses of his choice in allied or related fields to furnish proper coherence for his special interests.

"The third major change is the adoption of comprehensive examinations in the major field. These are to be called General Examinations and would be given in the spring of the student's senior year. Their purpose is to keep the student constantly prepared in his major work and to help him to organize as fruitfully as possible this center of his intellectual activity.

"As of this writing the Trustees have accepted in principle the major revisions as proposed by the Faculty Committee. There is still some discussion, however, on one or two details of the new program. Final acceptance of the New Curriculum will depend on reaching an agreement on these points.

"During the Trinity Term of 1960 all departments would examine their offerings and would review their suggested related courses so that both would fit in with the spirit of the new curriculum. They might recast some courses, drop others, and possibly organize new courses or different combinations of present offerings.

"It is proposed that all freshmen entering Trinity in September 1960 be under the New Curriculum. Upperclassmen who have an 80 average and who fulfill the Basic Requirements might also elect the New Curriculum at that time. A period of transition would be in effect until September 1963 when all students would be taking the New Curriculum.

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"In summary, a common core of degree requirements should have a more unifying effect on both the Faculty and on the students. In addition, the increased emphasis on the Major with its comprehensive examinations along with better provisions for more independent work should enable the student to derive more lasting values from his experience with liberal education."

President Jacobs highly praised the work of the committee and particularly its policy of keeping the Faculty in the picture at all stages. The important recommendations of the department heads and the full discussion by the entire Faculty of the whole problem made possible a truly cooperative final recommendation from the Faculty to the Trustees. President Jacobs paid tribute to the committee for its dedicated work and for the constructive thought which was given to a matter of vital importance to the future of the College.

There are certain questions which arise as one reads the foregoing description of the major changes. We shall endeavor to answer some of the questions which Alumni and Parents will ask as they consider this new program.

Questions and Answers

Why has the number of course requirements for a degree been diminished? The committee feels that more concentration and deeper penetration into the major field of study is possible if the basic requirements in six fundamental areas of knowledge are passed during the student's first two years in college. Actually the reduction of course load in the junior and senior years would give the student more time to explore his major field of study. The introduction of comprehensive examinations would give urgency for deeper study and correlation of learning throughout the four years of study. It would develop the student's ability to reason, to use his imagination and to communicate his ideas. It further seeks to develop a capacity for continuing self-education.

What are the areas to be studied in the six Basic Requirements? While the subcommittee has suggested the following areas, there is still some discussion in the matter of details. The problems are being studied by the Joint (Trustee-Faculty) Committee on Educational Policy. In general, however, candidates for the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science Degrees would fulfill the Basic Requirements by taking courses in six broad areas designed to give the student a general view of the fundamental areas of human knowledge.

"1. The first Basic Requirement is a course in English writing, reading, and speaking to provide intensive practice in communication, including an introduction to literature to develop an understanding of the ideas and art in significant works of Western culture.

"2. The second Basic Requirement is a course in a foreign language to equip the student to deal in an effective manner with the language of another people and to understand their culture.

"3. The third Basic Requirement is a course in Western European history to provide a foundation for studying the organization of modern society and human relationships.

"4. The fourth Basic Requirement is a course in Mathematics to develop the power to analyze and to deal with abstractions.

"5. The fifth Basic Requirement is a course in natural science to develop an understanding of scientific techniques and theory.

"6. The sixth Basic Requirement is a course in literature or fine arts or music to examine the record of human achievement and to develop standards of esthetic, cultural, and moral value."

Will students who have demonstrated pre-college mastery of one or more of these Basic Requirements be able to receive credit for this mastery? Yes. The faculty, prior to passing the New Curriculum, had passed a motion to accept scores of 5, 4 and 3 on the Advanced Placement Examinations for placement, for qualitative credit, and for quantitative credit in all subjects in the program.

What is the value of the comprehensive examination? Dr. George B. Cooper, chairman of both curriculum committees, explains, "These General Examinations, as they will be called, will keep the student in a state of sustained preparation. Upon completing a course, he will no longer be tempted to throw away his books."

How will this new curriculum affect the Engineering Program?--(both the engineering major, and the five-year engineering program). In the first place it will permit the engineering student to gain a broader liberal arts background. There will be no great change in this program other than the omission of one course.

What effect will this have on the AFROTC program? At present the government has certain course requirements which it places upon its students. A study is being made into this problem and we hope for more definite answers in a later issue of the *Magazine*.

How would these broad changes affect the individual departments and the courses they will offer? Each of the academic departments would re-examine the requirements for its major program and the related courses so that both would fit in with the spirit of the New Curriculum.

This may mean the recasting and/or dropping of courses where necessary or desirable.

What changes may result in respect to examinations, registration, etc.? An *ad hoc* committee has been appointed to study registration, scheduling, etc. Progress is being made to bring about more effective and efficient ways of carrying on the necessary mechanical matters which affect and are affected by the new curriculum changes.

1960 CONVOCATION

Saturday, April 9

Memorial Field House

10:00 A.M. 2:30 P.M. 8:15 P.M.

The New World Ahead:
Interpretation and Prophecy